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Letters

Terror Is the Most Effective Weapon of Nicaragua's 'Contras'

To the Editor:

My experiences as a member of the directorate of the Fuerza Democrática Nicaraguense, the principal U.S.-funded "contra" group fighting to overthrow Nicaragua's Sandinista Government, compel me to dispute some of the statements of Arturo Cruz, Adolfo Calero and Alfonso Robelo Callejas, the directorate of the United Nicaraguan Opposition (Op-Ed, Dec. 13).

For them to claim that the "contras" "are not, and will never be, the instrument of a foreign power" is laughable. When I joined the F.D.N. in 1981, I hoped it would be controlled by Nicaraguans and dedicated to objectives we would determine. But the "contras" were, and are, a proxy army controlled by the U.S. Government.

If U.S. support were terminated, they would not only be incapable of conducting any military activities against the Sandinistas, but would also immediately begin to disintegrate. I resigned rather than continue as a Central Intelligence Agency puppet.

It is cynical to assert that the "contras" respect human rights. During my four years as a "contra" director, it was premeditated policy to terrorize civilian noncombatants to prevent them from cooperating with the Government. Hundreds of civilian murders, mutilations, tortures and rapes were committed in pursuit of this policy, of which the "contra" leaders and their C.I.A. superiors were well aware.

Only when these practices were revealed in the U.S. press and by human-rights groups did the "contra" leaders feel compelled to give lip service to ending them. But no serious effort to stop them has been made, because terror is the most effective weapon of the "contras." In August 1985, in a typical case, the "contras" briefly occupied the town

of Cuapa, gathered the residents in the town square, selected those civilians they suspected of sympathizing with the Government and shot them in cold blood as a lesson.

It is a gross fabrication to claim that the "contras" are composed of "democratic groups," who "joined in the revolution against Anastasio Somoza." As I can attest, the "contra" military force is directed and controlled by officers of Somoza's National Guard, who fought at the dictator's side until the very end and then fled to Honduras. My knowledge is confirmed by an April 1985 Congressional study that shows that 46 of the 48 positions in the F.D.N.'s military leadership were held by ex-National Guardsmen. At U.S. urging, some former Somoza opponents — including Mr. Cruz and Mr. Robelo — have now been affiliated with the "contras" to make them more palatable to Congress. But real power in this military organization rests with those who have the guns — the ex-guardsmen.

The Sandinistas, for all their faults, have made enormous advances in education, housing and health care, issues of vital importance to Nicaragua's poor majority. Unfortunately,

the "contras" burn down schools, homes and health centers as fast as the Sandinistas build them.

While Nicaragua's economy is suffering — partly because of Sandinista mistakes, but more because of the war and the U.S. economic embargo — the Sandinistas must be credited with generating an atmosphere of genuine equality for the first time in Nicaragua's history. By contrast, the "contras" who were my colleagues talked mostly of recovering their lost wealth and privileged status.

In the late 1920's, the U.S. created the National Guard to defeat nationalistic rebels led by Augusto Sandino. With U.S. help, the National Guard seized power, and its leader — Anastasio Somoza — began a 45-year family dynasty that was one of the bloodiest and most corrupt in Latin America.

The Nicaraguan people — deeply conscious of their own history — show no signs of failing for the same trick twice.

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Key Biscayne, Fla., Dec. 30, 1985

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